

RICKINGHALL HERITAGE CIRCLE

At the January meeting of the Heritage Circle some of the secrets of a Fine Art Auctioneer were disclosed by Neil Lanham, who was for many years an auctioneer at Clare. After leaving an Estate Agent office he bought a failing Fine Art Auctioneers business and started by selling anything and everything. He straight away made a profit on some old English oak furniture, so he continued to obtain as much of this as he could. This was followed by other quality English furniture and gradually he gained a world-wide reputation as an honest auctioneer who got the best possible prices for his clients.

He explained the secrets he felt were behind his success as follows:

- he felt that staying as a "local" saleroom meant that he knew his clients and customers better than a big national company could;
- he always researched the background to his sale goods so he could describe them accurately in his catalogue;
- he never used the expressions "in the style of" or "believed to be from" – it was better to not put a name to it if he could not prove the provenance;
- he didn't use an estimated price in his catalogues – he felt this could deter some customers and also might mean not getting the best price for his customer, to whom he advised a reserve price which he never disclosed elsewhere;
- his sales were always well advertised with many posters and good quality catalogues;
- he sent free catalogues to dealers and collectors he thought might be interested in particular items for sale;
- his was one of the earliest salerooms to use telephone and later internet bidding.

Mr Lanham's interesting talk was accompanied by slides and anecdotes of many of the outstanding art and furniture he had sold for amazingly high, and unexpected, prices. He said many people – including businesses and churches – do not know what treasures they own, and if they are considering selling anything they should always take advice from a reputable dealer and get at least two estimated prices.

The speaker at the meeting on 23rd March will be Peter Driver on "Follies and Oddities of Suffolk". Visitors are always welcome.

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